

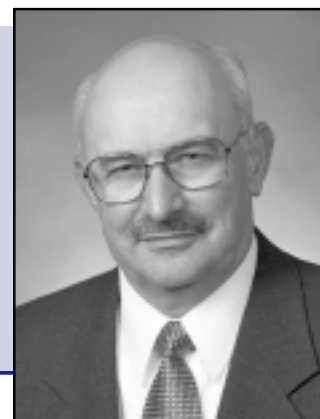


REPRESENTATIVE

**MARY
SKINNER**

2001 14TH DISTRICT REPORT

End of Session Report & Survey



REPRESENTATIVE

**JIM
CLEMENTS**

YOUR 14TH DISTRICT TEAM

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October 2001

Dear friends,

A new perspective to the challenges that faced our state's legislators during the 2001 session has been brought into focus by the September 11 attack on our nation.

We addressed the significant earthquake damage sustained by our state, responded to the effects of a statewide drought and high-cost energy shortage, and worked through three special sessions focusing on transportation, agriculture disaster relief and other matters. These sessions extended well into the just-ended summer, in what many veterans have called the most unusual year in the Legislature! Our concerns now seem small compared to the tragedies that struck our national capital, New York City and Pennsylvania. Those who have suffered and our national leaders continue to need our prayers and support.

While the focus remains on things left unfinished in this 2001 session, we were still able to make progress on issues essential to families of the Yakima Valley. This newsletter provides an insight to the highlights of the 2001 legislative year and those items we continue to work on that will affect you. As you read, please remember how privileged we are, as Americans, to have the ability to resolve issues and address our citizens' needs through self-governance and elected representation.

If you have comments or questions, please call or write us. Thank you for the honor of allowing us to serve you.

Sincerely,

Mary Skinner
State Representative

Jim Clements
State Representative

14TH DISTRICT

REP. MARY SKINNER • REP. JIM CLEMENTS

OPERATING BUDGET: A RECIPE FOR TAX HIKES

We knew going into the legislative session in January that the operating budget would be tight. Voters in November had approved education spending and tax relief measures of nearly \$970 million, virtually eliminating revenue surpluses. Tax revenues slowed due to a cooling economy. Health care and energy costs were rising substantially. Teachers and state employees demanded pay raises. The state simply didn't have the money to meet all the demands.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Clements worked on setting priorities in the budget and making decisions to direct our limited resources, just as families do when planning their household budgets. However, the Democrats independently crafted their own budget, which spends \$760 million more than expected revenue. Under very conservative assumptions, the state's general fund will have a deficit of about \$680 million by the next biennium.

This fiscal approach does a disservice to citizens. We remain concerned that this budget, which was adopted, more than likely will require significant budget cuts to existing services, tax increases, or both. That's why we voted no.

QUALITY EDUCATION - LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

Ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed through a quality education is perhaps the most important task we face as your state representatives. As former school teachers, we both understand the significance of keeping qualified professionals in the classrooms.

We supported legislation to address teacher shortages plaguing our schools by allowing retired teachers to be rehired without cutting their pensions. The Legislature also approved a measure that allows schools to hire community professionals, such as retired scientists and computer experts, as teachers without having to go through the long certification process. We honored voter-approved initiatives by providing full cost-of-living salary increases for teachers and picking up a larger portion of health benefit costs. We boosted funding to the Better Schools program, providing \$87.5 million for class size reduction and extended learning purposes in grades K-4. We also allocated \$7.8 million for improved reading programs and \$2.8 million for focused assistance educational audits to help low-performing schools.

Even in a tough budget year, we did all these things for education... and more. The future of our children remains our top priority.

CAPITAL BUDGET PROVIDES FOR HIGHER - ED CENTER

We were fortunate that in a year when money was tight, the Legislature recognized the need to expand Yakima Valley Community College's educational program. Just over \$16.5 million was secured in the capital budget to build a higher education center at YVCC.

Senator Deccio spearheaded the work in the Senate, and although the 49-49 tie in the House made our negotiating strategy difficult, our support for this project was "unwavering," in the words of YVCC President Linda Kaminski. We are pleased that ground was broken in mid-August for the higher-ed center, which will help our students and our local economy in countless ways. Next we'll work on obtaining the \$1.5 million more to finish the center.



Rep. Mary Skinner announces funding for YVCC's higher education center.

2001 SESSION REPORT

TRANSPORTATION PLAN SHOULD NOT BE JUST A 'BLANK CHECK'

Although we don't have the same traffic congestion problems as the central Puget Sound region, we understand the importance of a strong transportation system to our region. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, Rep. Skinner worked for a long-term transportation plan that protects our economy, keeps people and products moving, and includes efforts toward greater efficiency and accountability.

We both supported measures to streamline the road project permitting process, to allow the state to contract for engineering services, and for more efficient right-of-way acquisition — steps that were accepted and passed by the full Legislature. These, however, were only a small part of a larger package of critical efficiency measures we proposed that the governor did not accept.

Instead of providing a plan that would detail how your tax dollars would be spent, the governor wanted a multibillion-dollar transportation tax package that did not include reforms, or even assurances that the money could make a dent in our transportation problems. This plan included a 9-cent per gallon gas tax hike, a sales tax increase on car purchases, a surcharge on diesel fuel and a boost in truck and recreational vehicle fees.

We were concerned about this blank-check proposal and particularly disappointed that the governor reneged on his promise to give voters the final say on such a large tax increase. That's the main reason why the third special session ended without enough votes, Democrat or Republican, to pass a comprehensive transportation package in the House.

We know the impact this kind of tax increase could have on Yakima Valley families who already are struggling. Citizens want government to change the way it does business before handing over more of their hard-earned money for new taxes. Our state needs a plan that is fair to taxpayers and will make a difference. Unfortunately, such a plan has yet to come to the negotiating table.



Tori Volker, a West Valley ninth-grader, was among the area high school students who served as legislative pages for Rep. Clements during the 2001 session.

PINE HOLLOW WATER PROJECT MOVES AHEAD

Water is more precious than gold in the Yakima Valley. Making sure farmers, business, local government and fish get the water they need has been a priority for Rep. Clements since he began serving in the House six years ago. This year's drought and the premature irrigation-water shutoff it caused in the valley only point up the need for off-stream storage reservoirs in the Yakima Basin, like the Pine Hollow Reservoir project.

The multi-purpose Pine Hollow project, to be located near Wiley City and Tampico, would provide irrigation water for the Ahtanum Irrigation District in addition to benefiting fish, flood control efforts and recreational opportunities. The 25,000-plus acre-feet of water that would be stored off-stream at Pine Hollow would help restore adequate flows to Ahtanum watershed creeks during the summer.

Three years ago Jim pushed for \$300,000 to conduct a pre-construction analysis for Pine Hollow. This session, although money was tighter than ever, he worked to secure \$325,000 to complete the project's environmental impact statement and move Pine Hollow a step closer to construction. Just this month, Rep. Clements obtained \$375,000 in federal funds to conduct a watershed assessment and wrap up the project's scientific work within 18 months. He expects to smell fresh concrete soon!

2001 LEGISLATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Many thanks to those of you who took time out of your busy schedule earlier this year to respond to our legislative questionnaire. We thought you'd like to see how you and your 14th District neighbors responded.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Rank the issues that are important to you.

- 22% Health Care
- 19% Education
- 18% Crime
- 13% Energy supplies
- 11% Property taxes
- 5% Growth management
- 5% Transportation
- 5% Environment
- 2% Social Services

BUDGET

In light of the voter-mandated education spending requirements, what action should the Legislature take to balance the budget?

- 47% Reduce spending for other state services at the same rate as it has been over the past few years.
- 31% Privatize many state services to help reduce spending.
- 17% Raise taxes to provide more revenue for the state's new spending needs while maintaining spending levels for other important state services.
- 5% Spend the state budget surplus and Emergency Reserve Fund to pay for the increased spending.

EDUCATION

What are your education priorities?

- 26% Improve teacher training
- 25% Increase academic requirement
- 22% Reduce class sizes
- 16% Allow school levies to pass with simple majority
- 10% Raise teacher salaries
- 1% Increase construction/maintenance

ELECTIONS

Which do you support for our state's primary election system?

- 84% A blanket primary
- 8% A closed primary
- 8% An open primary

TRANSPORTATION

Rank the transportation solutions in order of importance to you.

- 41% Explore alternatives
- 35% Maintain roads
- 13% Add roads
- 6% Walk & bike paths
- 5% Reduce traffic

HEALTH CARE

How should prescription drug discounts for seniors be funded?

- 64% State should fund them
- 36% Pharmacies should fund them

How should the Legislature deal with the rising cost and utilization of prescription drugs for low-income senior citizens?

- 52% Create a limited, state-funded prescription drug benefit program, funded in part with money from the state's tobacco settlement, until a prescription drug benefit is made available to Medicaid recipients.
- 28% Create a limited, state-funded prescription drug benefit program, funded in part from rebates from drug manufacturers, for low-income seniors, requiring retail pharmacies agreeing to participate in the voluntary program to provide prescription drugs at discount prices.
- 20% Have the state wait for the federal government to make a prescription drug benefit available to Medicare recipients.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

How do you feel about the new restrictions to the Shoreline Management Act?

- 63% Rescind the SMA
- 37% Leave the SMA alone

2001 SESSION REPORT

ENSURING QUALITY CARE FOR SENIORS

As co-vice chair of the House Health Care Committee, Rep. Skinner took on the responsibility of senior and long-term care issues. She introduced three bills to improve the safety and quality of long-term care services in our state. House Bill 1426 revamps a voluntary quality improvement program for boarding homes so that more providers will participate. The program is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services. House Bill 1320 includes higher standards and qualifications for those desiring to become a licensed adult family home provider. House Bill 2041 provides new protection standards for residents in boarding homes and adult family homes. Each of these bills were approved by the Legislature and signed into law.

We've also been concerned about the unaffordable prices of prescription drugs — especially for low-income seniors on fixed incomes. Mary co-sponsored a comprehensive package of bills aimed at providing prescription assistance to senior citizens. The first measure would have established a senior pharmacy assistance program for low-income seniors. The second bill would have established a medication outreach program to help seniors obtain prescription drugs. The third bill would have requested that Congress add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. Unfortunately, none of these proposals made it through the Legislature. This will be a top priority when the Legislature convenes in the 2002 session.

RELIEF FOR AG WINS APPROVAL

Months of work, beginning with a February agricultural forum spearheaded by Rep. Clements, led to passage of a three-part, \$7.7 million tax relief package for Washington growers:

- **SB 5496** - Provides exemptions from sales and use taxes for FDA- or USDA-approved animal pharmaceuticals. Currently, livestock farmers pay on average \$2,800 a year in taxes

on the pharmaceutical products they buy.

- **HB 1906** - Exempts machinery and equipment owned by a farmer and used exclusively to grow agricultural products from the state property tax. The exemption would first apply for 2003 property taxes.
- **HB 2138** (co-sponsored by Rep. Clements) - Reduces the business and occupation tax rate for the manufacturers of dairy products, and provides an exemption from the retail sale and use taxes for heating fuel and bedding materials for chicken farms.
- **HB 1752** (introduced by Rep. Clements) lets rangeland owners file claims for wildlife damage, the same way crop and fruit farmers can, effectively putting the value of grazing land on a par with other agricultural crops.
- **HB 1606** (also introduced by Rep. Clements) allows utilities to pay farmers who reduced the amount of electricity used for irrigation this growing season.

PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY PENSIONS

The strong stock market performance of the late 1990s was good for many state employee pension plans, particularly one for law enforcement officers and fire fighters. The surplus in the LEOFF 1 retirement system reached about \$1.2 billion last year, and when they needed to fill a multimillion-dollar hole in their budget, the Democrats in the Senate and the House tried to tap that fund. They also promised pension plan members a lump-sum payment. House Republicans successfully opposed the bill because we didn't think it was an appropriate or stable source of funding for government.

What happened? As the stock market has cooled, the LEOFF 1 surplus has lost about a billion dollars, or about 80 percent of its value. If we had not stood together against the Democrats' plan, the state would be in an even deeper budget hole, and those lump-sum payments would have turned into bouncing checks. That's no way to treat the people who have worked so hard to protect citizens.

14TH DISTRICT

REP. MARY SKINNER • REP. JIM CLEMENTS

HOUSE HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE COMING TO YAKIMA

Have a question, concern, suggestion or idea about health care in our state? Bring your comments to a work session of the House of Representatives' Health Care Committee in Yakima.

The House Health Care Committee deals with issues related to the availability, affordability and accessibility of health care for low-income citizens. It also works on health insurance issues, reimbursement levels for health-care providers, and prescription drug coverage.

Normally, the committee meets exclusively in Olympia. This fall, however, the committee is meeting at other locations in the state, including Yakima.

Hosted by its co-vice chair, Rep. Mary Skinner, the Yakima meeting is a unique opportunity to be heard by a legislative committee that will be making important decisions affecting your health care in Washington.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Oct. 18, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m., Providence Medical Center auditorium, 110 South 9th Avenue, Yakima

KEEP IN TOUCH!

We feel it is important to be accessible to the people who put us here to represent them. If you have a question, a concern or an idea to share, pick up the phone or write us a letter. Many bills in the Legislature are often the result of a citizen's suggestion. Hearing from you helps us to best represent your interests. You may also use the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

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